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AUTHOR Bunch, Lela Kosteck
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ABSTRACT

In examining the topic of evaluation, it is necessary to look at the role of evaluation in supervision and professional development. For any program to be effective, research states that accountability must be the focus of those responsible for the program. Evaluation of program, results, and personnel is part of providing for accountability. The Performance-Based Professional School Counselor Evaluation System was designed and tailored for the role of the school counselor. School counselors, administrative personnel, and representatives from the Missouri School Counselor Association were just a few of the groups who helped design the evaluation tool. The instrument has the potential of bringing the activities of professional school counselors in line with their expertise and ensures students gain competency in necessary skills. The effectiveness of the evaluation is dependent upon mentoring new counselors and teachers in collaborative decision-making skills regarding the evaluation process. (JDM)

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Ensuring Professionally Relevant Supervision and Professional Development: A State-Level Experience

by

Lela Kosteck Bunch

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Chapter Fifteen

Ensuring Professionally Relevant Supervision and Professional Development: *A State-Level Experience*

Lela Kosteck Bunch
Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Jefferson City, Missouri

In examining the topic of evaluation, it is necessary to look at the role of evaluation in supervision and professional development. Why is evaluation important? Gysbers and Henderson (2000) state that in order for any program to be effective, all those charged with responsibility for the program must focus on accountability. Evaluation of program, results, and personnel is a part of providing for accountability. Personnel evaluation should be an ongoing process that provides feedback resulting in improvement and, thus, promoting continuous growth and development.

Generally, the word evaluation evokes negative feelings, and for good reason. Evaluation based on old schools of thought was conducted from a deficit model. It was regarded as punitive because it often focused on finding fault, identifying weaknesses, and citing what was bad or wrong based on an external observation. In fact, evaluation was sometimes used as a tool to eliminate individuals from the profession.

With the current teacher and counselor shortages, however, education cannot afford to waste its valuable resources. Of course, it is still important to weed out absolutely poor candidates, but the focus of current best practices in evaluation is to provide the supervision and guidance needed to address the problems of individuals who can benefit from such interventions, as well as to promote positive growth and development. The supervisor has a key role in this process by helping to build confidence and provide support and assistance.

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Need for a Professional School Counselor Evaluation Tool

The Missouri Excellence in Education Act of 1993 was a statewide initiative designed to ensure that educators were provided with supervision designed to help them grow and develop as professionals. It was part of an effort to ensure that Missouri students would achieve competency and to close the "achievement gap" between students of various ethnic groups. As a result of this act, the Performance-Based Teacher Evaluation System (PBTES) was developed in Missouri. One component of PBTES was mentoring, which was viewed as critical in helping practitioners make the transition from novice to experienced professionals. In addition, it was recognized that the responsibility for evaluation resided at the local district level. Overall, the evaluation of professional educators was to be based on their performance in specific areas. In time, the need for a separate instrument for professional school counselors became increasingly apparent.

This development came none too soon. Professional school counselors across the state were being evaluated in a variety of ways and to varying degrees. Some of the larger or more innovative schools had designed their own instruments or forms specifically tailored to the professional school counselor role. However, many professional school counselors in the state were not receiving a formal evaluation process due to the lack of an appropriate instrument. On the contrary, for many evaluation was a very informal process with no real viable outcome that could result in positive change or improvement. Another common practice across the state was for professional school counselors to be assessed using an instrument designed for classroom teachers. Because many of the items on such an instrument are not relevant to the role of the professional school counselor, they often would be marked "not applicable" or left blank. A large number of "not applicable" responses negated the purpose of evaluation and made the overall evaluation process nonproductive and ineffective. The problem, of course, was that professional school counselors were not being evaluated accurately with an instrument designed specifically for the important work they do.

The lack of a professional school counselor evaluation tool was not beneficial for professional school counselors because they received neither clear direction nor general guidelines to help them grow and develop. Without an accountability component, there was no way to ensure that they were implementing the most effective possible comprehensive guidance program. A relevant and appropriate professional school counselor evaluation tool also highlights a counselor's job responsibilities, ensuring that the administrator or supervisor understands the role of a school counselor in a comprehensive

guidance system. Thus, the lack of such a tool did not benefit supervisors or administrators either. Likewise, the absence of appropriate evaluation was not in the best interests of the children in the local school district, because there was no accountability system in place to ensure that the best prepared professionals were providing for the needs of the children. Finally, it was not good for the school and community as a whole because the potential benefits of a fully implemented comprehensive guidance program to support the goals of the school were not likely to be realized.

Although best practices emphasized the accountability and professional growth and development component of the evaluation process for teachers, there was no such element in place for professional school counselors. As the need for a separate instrument for professional school counselors became more and more profound, the Guidance and Placement Section of the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education was given the opportunity to create a document designed specifically for this purpose.

Design of a Relevant Evaluation Instrument

> The challenge then became to design an instrument that would follow the format of the PBTES instrument but be tailored to the unique role of the professional school counselor in delivering a comprehensive guidance program. The resulting process was called the Performance-Based Professional School Counselor Evaluation System (PBPSCES).

Like its teacher evaluation counterpart, PBPSCES was developed by a statewide committee. The following groups were invited to participate in the development of this project:

- professional school counselor practitioners representing all regions of the state;
- professional school counselor practitioners representing various grade levels;
- administrators;
- counselor educators;
- representatives of the Missouri School Counselor Association, the state professional organization for professional school counselors;
- state education department staff; and
- the state consultant on the PBTES

The PBPSCES mirrors the PBTES in its emphasis on evaluation and professional development. The instrument, as it was developed, was based on the premise that professional school counselors spend 100% of their time involved in guidance and counseling activities. It has the following features and benefits:

- It utilizes criteria related to guidance and counseling competencies.
- It correlates with the Missouri comprehensive guidance program model.
- It assumes that a job description has been developed and approved for the district's professional school counselors.
- It provides a tool for dialogue between the administrator or supervisor and the professional school counselor regarding the counselor's role.
- It provides professional school counselors with a vehicle for self-directed professional development.

However, the PBPSCES differs from the PBTES in significant areas. Most important, it is tied directly to the professional school counselor's role and identifies 15 specific performance criteria directly related to that role. It also recognizes the differing evaluation and supervision needs of beginning versus experienced professional school counselors. Addressing a concern specific to Missouri, the PBPSCES recognizes that new counselors may have different tenure statuses as district employees. In other words, an educator with 20 years experience as a teacher in the district who is beginning his or her first year as a professional school counselor will have different evaluation needs from a fourth-year counselor who does not yet have tenure in the district. The PBPSCES also addresses the issue of confidentiality, providing guidelines for administrators or supervisors regarding appropriate and inappropriate observation.

One significant aspect of the PBPSCES is that it not only provides direction for supervision and professional development, but it also emphasizes collaboration between the supervisor and the professional school counselor. It functions as a tool for dialogue, which gives the professional school counselor an opportunity to advocate and communicate with, and to educate, his or her supervisor. Realistically, professional school counselors cannot afford to assume that everyone, particularly those who supervise them, has a clear understanding of the work they do. On the contrary, many administrators or supervisors have not taken a course in comprehensive guidance as a part of their training, so they generally rely on their own personal experiences with professional school counselors—whatever those experiences have been—to determine their expectations for the role.

Additionally, the PBPSCES helps define how professional school counselors fit into a comprehensive school improvement plan. Although it recognizes the unique role of the professional school counselor, it also validates guidance and counseling as a part of the educational process as a whole. Guidance and counseling is an integral part of the educational system, and the system support component of the Missouri comprehensive guidance program model emphasizes that professional school counselors support school goals. Moreover, in Missouri the student guidance competencies identified as a part of the guidance program model have been cross-referenced to the Missouri

Show-Me Standards (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 1996) so the model is directly linked to supporting student achievement. Furthermore, because professional school counselors serve as change agents, they have the potential to promote positive school climate and contribute to ensuring that the school runs smoothly. Likewise, the PBPSCES recognizes that everyone makes a contribution to the smooth operation of the school and that the professional school counselor is no exception.

In order to ensure its validity, the PBPSCES is linked to the Missouri Comprehensive Guidance Program Model, the Missouri Show-Me Standards, individual professional development, school counselor training standards, student success, and best practices in supervision and evaluation. The instrument can be viewed at www.dese.state.mo.us/divteacherqual/profdev/Counselorscorrected2.pdf.

A copy of the *Guidelines for Performance-Based Professional School Counselor Evaluation* (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2000) was sent out to all administrators in the state at the beginning of the school year in August 2000. Professional school counselors were also notified that the document had been sent to their administrators. Unfortunately, many school counselors indicated that their administrators had not contacted them about it, and some were not even aware that it had been received. Overall, it seemed that there was poor communication between counselors and their supervisors in some districts regarding the availability of the new instrument. The challenge continues to be to educate administrators and supervisors regarding the comprehensive guidance program and its benefits to the school program. Certainly, the PBPSCES can be beneficial tool for dialogue between the professional school counselor and his or her supervisor. Of course, it would be ideal to require administrators and supervisors to take a class about comprehensive guidance and counseling programs in order to improve their understanding and insight into the role of the professional school counselor.

Certainly, the PBPSCES is an important first step in recognizing and realizing the unique role of the professional school counselor in the schools. Another positive step to improve awareness would be for counselor education programs to spend more time in the preservice stage providing counselor trainees with the skills necessary to advocate for their programs once they go into the schools.

Conclusion

Personnel evaluation is a critical component in the evaluation of a comprehensive guidance program. The effectiveness of the evaluation system depends upon (a) the mentoring of first- and second-year

professional school counselors as they make the transition into their career, and (b) the training of professional school counselors and their administrators or supervisors regarding the collaborative decision making that must take place between them regarding the evaluation process.

Overall, the PBPSCES can be a valuable resource. If used in the spirit it was designed, it has the potential for bringing the activities of professional school counselors in line with their expertise, allowing them to devote 100% of their time to 100% of the students, and ensuring that all students gain competency in life skills. (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education)

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About the Author

Lela Kosteck Bunch, Ph.D., NCC, LPC, is currently director of guidance and placement in the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. In the past she has worked as a school counselor, a supervisor of adult education, an outpatient therapist, and a psychoeducational consultant. She can be reached at lbunch1@mail.dese.state.mo.us, or at P.O. Box 480, Jefferson City, MO 65102-0480.